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Housekeepers' Chats

December 24, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "The Child's Christmas." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Good Food Habits for Children."

Our house has been a lively place the last few days. The holiday guests have arrived and among the most prominent are Horace and Ann, both under six. The world is full of surprises for unsuspecting grown-ups with them about to join in Betty Jane's plans. They scramble out of bed early in the morning, eager not to lose a minute of the precious days before Christmas. I hear their small, shrill voices chatting together excitedly in the front bedroom as they dress. Mysterious business, I assure you, and very private. Then there is the merry tumble down to breakfast, during which there are many looks passed between the three youngsters and much conversation that we grown-ups are not to understand. Yes, life has become very full of surprising events for Uncle Ebenezer and me.

All day there is much tip-toeing and whispering. Now and then I blunder onto a private conference and cause a small voice to exclaim: "Oh, please, Aunt Sammy, don't go into the hall for a few minutes," or, "That box in the cellar is private, Aunt Sammy. Please don't let Uncle Ebenezer look when he goes down to fix the furnace."

One of my friends often says, "I always want to be a child again when Christmas comes around."

But I think we grown-ups get quite as much pleasure watching the younger members of the family as they do themselves. In fact, this is so much the case that I think we are likely to encourage them to overdo the festivity without realizing it. Parents and aunts and uncles are sometimes a bit selfish and thoughtless about children's fun. We forget all the common sense we have been using for the rest of the year and upset the child's daily schedule by letting him go without sleep, proper food and rest and by giving him meals at irregular hours and quantities of sweets which spoil his appetite for the food he needs. Yes, and to add to that, we over-stimulate him by too many toys, too much company and excitement generally. Is it any wonder that by the next day, or even by Christmas afternoon, the child is cross and unreasonable, more ready for bed than for further enjoyment of the holiday?

"But, Aunt Sammy," I can hear you say, "don't you believe in letting children have a good time on Christmas? What if they do get a little tired? Isn't it worth it for one day in the year? Excitement, lots of toys, and candy--why, those things spell Christmas to most children."

Small doses, Paulina, is all that I am pleading for. The children I know-- and there are a good many of them--enjoy moderation quite as much and usually more, than excess, and that rule applies particularly to Christmas.

I'd like to tell you about a Christmas I spent with some friends of mine a few years ago.

There were three little children in the family, three fat, rosy, good-natured children, who had their daily quota of sleep at regular hours, simple wholesome meals and lots of outdoor play in the fresh air and sunshine. Those children enjoyed life if ever children did, and so, I might add, did their parents. It is a pleasure to have children around who rarely cry on any account and are never cross.

A day or two before Christmas the scene began to change. Packages from fond relatives began to pour in at each mail and on Christmas Eve the relatives who lived near-by came in, literally laden with gifts for the children. Those gifts ranged all the way from the sublime to the ridiculous. There were tricycles, roller skates, innumerable dolls, mechanical trains, tops, bob-sleds, balls, blocks, kiddie cars, doll's houses, puzzles and paints, teddy bears and tea sets, books and boxing gloves. I never saw such an array. And, actually--though I know you'll find this hard to believe--one cousin had sent Doris, aged two years, a ping-pong set and five-year-old Bob a set of detective stories.

Well, when we put all those things around the tree, there wasn't much tree left to be seen. The place looked like the storage room in a toy shop.

I suggested putting some of the things away and bringing them out later in the year for special occasions, but my friend said she had to consider the relatives and not hurt their feelings when they had been so generous. She said that many of them would be dropping in the next morning to see the children get their presents and would, of course, be hurt if their things were not in evidence.

When the children came down the next morning and took one look at that pile of playthings, they were too excited to eat breakfast. Their mother had great difficulty getting them to the table at all, and then they could hardly eat more than a mouthful of anything.

At about this time, the cousins and uncles and aunts began to arrive and each took a hand in helping along what they called "the children's fun". The children themselves were so bewildered by the array of gifts that they scarcely knew where to begin when it came to opening them, and by the time they had tried to play with them all, they had become nervous and confused. One uncle was trying to teach Bob to use the boxing gloves, while poor Bob was looking longingly at his coaster-wagon, and the aunts were encouraging Doris and Dotty to play dominoes, when they were far too excited to sit still anyway and much too young to understand the game. It was not long before the children were quarrelling and throwing their new toys about. Those lovely crayons that Aunt Rose brought back from Paris were broken in a minute. The aunts became offended by the children's manners and mother felt that she must step in and punish the children.

R-H.C. 12/24/30

Too many toys spoil the fun, Paulina, I have seen it happen so many times. A few simple toys that children can do something with, and a Christmas morning spent in using them quietly and happily without too much interference from grown-ups - that is the recipe for real fun

By dinner-time the children were too tired and had eaten too much candy to have any appetite for food. Tears were shed at the table and most of the guests felt that the children were spoiled and that their mother did not have proper control over them.

For happier Christmases we recommend some peace and quiet to allow the children to play quietly as they please. And we are keeping up the regular schedule of plenty of rest and sleep, simple food and sweets given only after meals in moderate quantities.

Then there is this matter of breakfast. A good breakfast on Christmas morning is especially important because it fills up space that might otherwise be used for too much candy, and it prevents the fatigue that may come when dinner is inclined to be a little late. Breakfast first and presents afterward is probably a good plan for most households. Mother can do a great deal to help by making the atmosphere at the table pleasant but calm, so that the children will finish all their food before they open their gifts.

Here is a menu for breakfast on Christmas morning, planned by the Menu Specialist who was thinking especially of the children:

Sliced oranges,
Hot cereal with cream, or top milk for the children.
Scrambled eggs served with chopped parsley, red jelly and crisp bacon
Toast or hot biscuits
Coffee or milk

Those scrambled eggs will be especially light and fluffy if they are cooked in the double boiler without water. And the red jelly and parsley will carry out the Christmas color scheme.

Tomorrow: Family Ties at Christmas.

